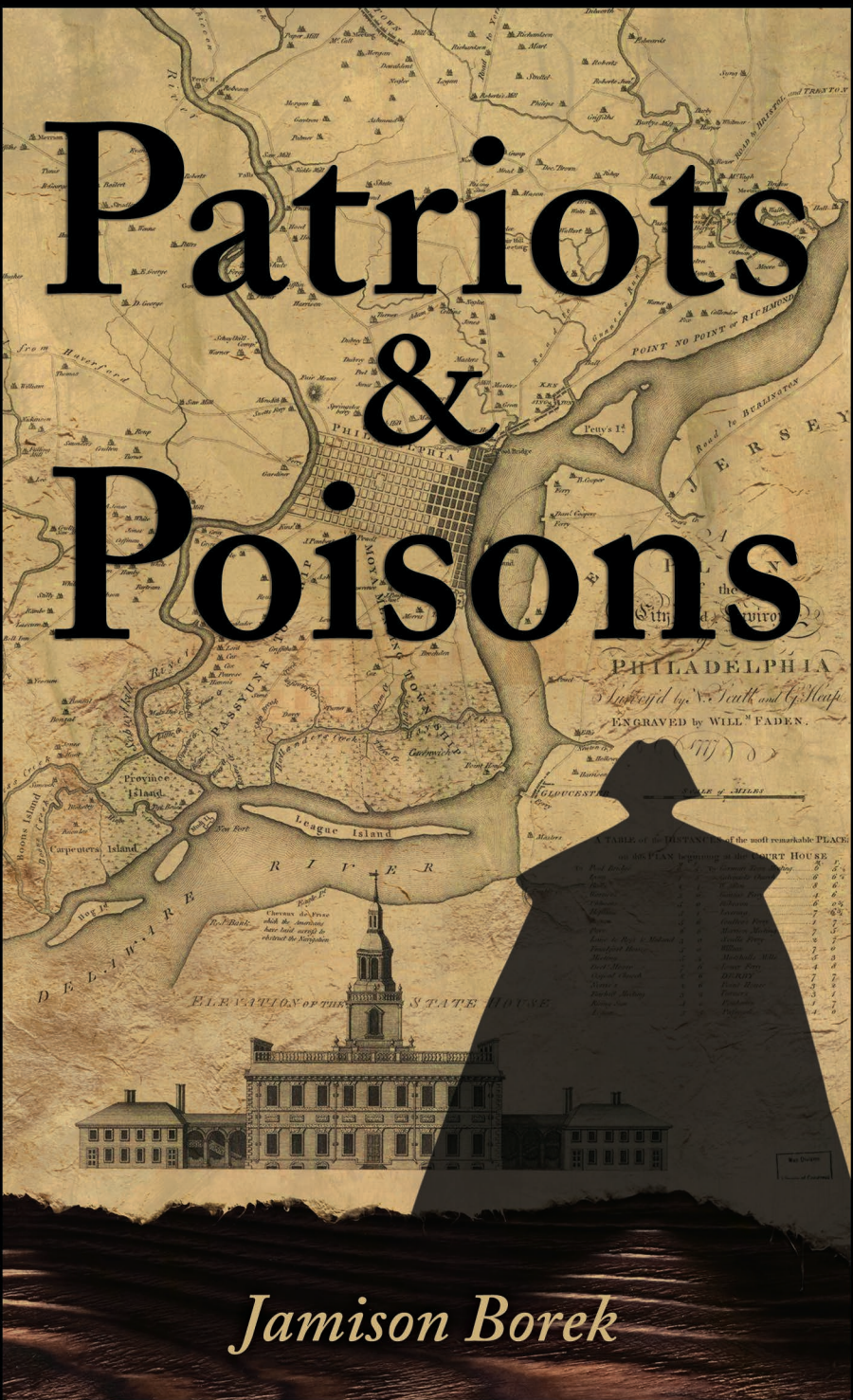


Patriots & Poisons



Jamison Borek

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Is President John Adams trying to murder Thomas Jefferson? Now that George Washington is no longer President, is the United States falling apart? Shocking allegations are being made in the wake of a waiter's death at Washington's farewell dinner — that Jefferson was the intended victim instead of the waiter, that he is the target of a deadly political assassination plot.

Is President Adams really a murderer? So many people want to see Jefferson dead. Could it be the preacher who thinks Jefferson's an agent of the Devil? A jilted lover or a jealous rival? The former captive of the Barbary pirates who blames Jefferson for his sorry fate? Or did the murderer only want to kill the waiter, after all?

As the country slides quickly toward anarchy and civil war, Senator Jacob Martin must find the answers, to save the country and the woman he loves.

Patriots and Poisons, an engaging mystery full of historically accurate and vivid detail, takes you back to 1797 Philadelphia, a critical time in United States history when people could still ask the question seriously, whether declaring Independence was a terrible mistake.

\$12.95

ISBN 978-0-9915366-3-4



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Patriots
&
Poisons

A Founding Fathers Mystery

Jamison Borek

Patriots and Poisons

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ISBN-10 0991536630

ISBN-13 978-09915366-3-4

Published by:



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Historical Note

In March, 1797, Philadelphia was the capital of the United States and John Adams had just been elected President. The federal government – Congress, President, Supreme Court, and all – had moved to Philadelphia from New York late in 1790. Only in November of 1800 would they move to the newly-created District of Columbia.

The election of 1796 was the first Presidential election that had more than one candidate running against each other. In the two prior elections under the new Constitution (the prior Articles of Confederation having proved a miserable failure), George Washington was so overwhelmingly popular that no one even thought of running against him. Some thought he should run for a third term, or even dispense with elections altogether and declare himself King.

The revolution had been won, but it was still an open question whether the United States would survive. The first try at organizing a new government, the Articles of Confederation, had been a failure. There were hopes that the new Constitution would

be more successful, but it was too soon to tell. The former colonies distrusted the federal government and each other, and two bitterly opposing political parties had emerged. The Federalists and the Republicans, or “Democratical Republicans,” as they called themselves, each thought the other would, if given power, destroy everything they’d risked their lives and fortunes to bring into being.

The Republican Party then was not the Republican Party we’re familiar with now. It was a populist and largely southern, agrarian party which evolved over time into today’s Democratic Party. The Federalist Party was more conservative, mercantile, and northern. In the early 1800s it disappeared entirely.

Strange as it may seem in retrospect, this development of rival political parties was largely unforeseen by the drafters of the United States Constitution. The idea was so far from their minds that the Constitution originally provided that the runner-up for President would become the Vice-President. So when Federalist John Adams was elected President by a narrow margin, his fiercest rival – Republican Thomas Jefferson – became his Vice-President, and that is where this story begins.

∞ I ∞

“The first mistake in publick business is the going into it.”

– Poor Richard’s Almanac

They met at midnight, on a dark and empty stretch of the Delaware River shore. The moon was a pale sliver in a wintry sky and the wind was raw and cold. The Delaware was so thick with ice, it was impassable. The normal river traffic – the tall-masted ships, the launchers, the rowboats and other river craft – all were gone, awaiting the springtime thaw.

A large man stood by the shore, shrouded by shadow. In the distance, whale-oil streetlights shed a murky light on the dockside wharves, counting houses, and taverns, but the light did not reach so far as the river’s edge. The man stamped his feet and drew his threadbare cloak yet tighter still around him, cursing his absent companion. He’d been waiting for nearly half an hour now, his feet growing numb with cold and his impatience steadily growing stronger.

When at last the awaited figure suddenly appeared, it seemed almost to surprise him. He forgot himself and called out.

“Hallo! It’s about time you . . .” He quickly stopped himself, but it was enough. In the distance, a cloaked figure halted for a moment in his progress.

Belatedly prudent, the tall man said nothing more until he and his companion were standing face to face, close together. Then he spoke again.

“One hundred and fifty guineas, that’s what you said?” His harsh whisper barely rose above the sound of the wind.

“Yes, one hundred fifty guineas, a princely sum. But only fifty now and the rest when the deed is completed.”

“I will do it.”

He held out his empty hand.

His companion pulled out a small leather bag and he took it, feeling the weight of it. Then he pulled out a coin and studied it – even in the darkness, there was a glint of gold. He bit it to test its softness and then nodded his satisfaction.

The other produced a second offering, this time a small metal flask.

“It’s settled then. Go now, quickly. Take this brandy too. When you get back to your lodgings, you can warm yourself by drinking a toast. I suggest that it be – ‘To the Vice President.’”

The silence was broken by a mocking laugh.

“To Thomas Jefferson, may he never again run against me! To George Washington, may he soon leave town!”

President John Adams, alone in his rented room, lifted up his glass of brandy in a mock-toast and scowled – at the world in general and George Washington in particular. For months, he’d

eagerly counted the days, happily anticipating today, March 4, 1797, the day of his Presidential Inauguration. It would have been a perfect day but for Washington, damn him.

It could have been worse, to be sure. He could have lost the election. He'd beaten Jefferson in the end but the man was still nipping at his heels. What a big mistake they had made in drafting the Constitution, to give the runner-up for President the job of Vice-President, as a sort of consolation prize.

To make it worse, on this, his most glorious of days he had to attend a farewell dinner in honor of George Washington! At which he would be forced to play second-fiddle while Washington was heaped with gushing praise. Why did they have to hold it today, of all days? Didn't they realize Washington's sun had set, while his own was the sun that was rising? He himself was the President now.

Grumpily, Adams finished his glass of brandy and set out for Rickett's Circus. And that was another thing, he grumbled to himself. To hold such a dignified event in a circus ring! As if the government of the United States was on a par with acrobats, jugglers, clowns, and trick horseback-riders. As if Washington, and he himself, and the entire Cabinet were just another form of entertainment.

When Adams made his way into the hall, however, he had to admit they'd managed to transform it into a fitting location for a gala dinner. The vast circular room, ninety-seven feet wide, was filled with long trestle tables covered in white damask tablecloths and set with an entire shipload of china plates and crystal goblets. The room was suffused with a golden glow, the light from myriad candles set in elegant branching candlesticks and from patent lights on the pillars around the room. To top it off, a grand

chandelier hung down from over fifty feet above, from the very highest point of the tall, arching ceiling.

Some two hundred forty guests had been invited, the cream of Philadelphia society. It was a powerful, wealthy, and glamorous assembly. The men wore their very best silk or velvet jackets, waistcoats, and britches, with accessories (rings, watches, chains, knee- and shoe-buckles) of gold, diamonds, and other precious gems. Some of the women still wore the old-fashioned robes made from yards and yards of heavy brocades and damasks, but most were up-to-the-minute with the latest fashions in their slim, high-waisted gowns of velvet, silk, and sheerest muslin. Their persons were ornamented with a lavish and costly display of jewelry and their hair was elaborately coifed and curled. There was an entire array of stylish headwear – Grecian caps, bandeaux of silk and velvet, braids of pearls and ribbons, exotic turbans, and tall ostrich plumes in myriad colors waving high above the crowd.

The mood was festive, but also somber. The survival of the country seemed a chancy thing. George Washington had led the young nation for more than twenty years, from the Revolution to the Presidency, and now he was stepping down. John Adams was no Washington, to say the least of it. He was, at best, a difficult, vain, and pompous man. According to Benjamin Franklin (who ought to know), Adams was sometimes “absolutely out of his senses”.

Adams was the lesser of two evils, though (in the minds of the guests, who were mostly of the Federalist Party). Thomas Jefferson was dangerous, immoral, and evil. And a traitor too. He loved the revolutionary terrorists who were running France, they thought, so much that he’d sell out his very own country, if he got the chance.

But this was not a time for gloomy thoughts. It was a time for drinking and feasting. And what a feast it was! The waiters were endlessly emerging from the kitchen, bearing heavily-laden trays aloft. There were beef sirloins, breasts of veal, turkeys, ducks, and woodcocks, fricassees of chicken and rabbit, mutton pies, and every sort of fish and seafood. No less plentiful were the side dishes and sweets – Yorkshire puddings, plum puddings, pigeon pies, and Cheshire pork-pies, fluted glasses of hart’s horn jellies layered in ribbons of color and topped with whipped cream, cheese cakes, orange cakes, and even ice cream. Over four hundred different dishes in all, if you believed Samuel Richardet the caterer. To say nothing of the drink – many bottles of port, madeira, brandy, cider, and claret were being emptied throughout the meal, along with innumerable bowls of punch.

At the head table, seated amidst Washington, Adams, and the rest of the Cabinet, Thomas Jefferson stared at his dinner grumpily. Here he was, the lone Republican at a table full of Federalists.

Adams would surely regret, Jefferson consoled himself, that he’d kept on Washington’s Cabinet as his own. They were mostly “High Federalists,” extreme in their conservatism. They’d never be his men; they’d never even been loyal to Washington. Their loyalties were firmly attached to that cunning bastard, Alexander Hamilton.

Timothy Pickering, for example, sitting to his left. With his high forehead, long, sharp nose, and piercing blue eyes, he looked like some predatory bird – a hawk, perhaps, or better yet a vulture. What a man to be Secretary of State! A stiff-necked puritan from Salem, Massachusetts, always sure of his opinion and totally lacking in diplomacy. It was just like Washington to pick a man so

unsuited to the job. Washington's Presidency had been one long, uninterrupted reign of mediocrity and bad judgment.

"To the Vice President!"

The sound of his own name interrupted Jefferson's sour reflections. He rose, bowing slightly, his expression a mask of polite acknowledgment. He wore his long blue frock coat with his scarlet waistcoat and his hair (once reddish gold but now a graying, sandy hue) was long, lightly powdered, and wrapped in a longish queue with a black silk ribbon. He cut a good figure, one had to admit, with his impressive height and patrician bearing.

"To the Vice-President!"

Hundreds of voices filled the hall, echoing the toast in ragged unison. The raised glassware sparkled throughout the hall, reflecting the flickering light of many candles.

Many, no doubt, would just as soon have wished Jefferson dead, for with every passing day partisan hatreds grew fiercer. The toast was nonetheless remarkably cordial. It was not the first toast, not the first glass of fine spirits that had been drunk so far, and the guests were feeling correspondingly mellow.

When Jefferson resumed his seat, his polite, fixed smile quickly vanished. He prodded his food with his fork, not eating so much as moving the morsels here and there, creating a more symmetrical and orderly arrangement. He was not in the least bit hungry. For a while, he'd tried to amuse himself by counting whether there were really four hundred dishes as Richardet had boasted. The wine, however, had been very good (yes, he had to give them that) and he'd lost count of the dishes somewhere around two hundred and fifty. Yet still the dinner went on and on and the dishes kept coming.

Jacob Wagner, one of the State Department clerks, came up to the head table with mincing deference to speak to Pickering. A thin, dark man with perpetually hunched shoulders, he'd worked for Jefferson when he was Secretary of State, but Wagner gave no sign of greeting or recognition. Heads bent close together, Pickering and Wagner held a whispered conversation, occasionally darting a meaningful glance in Jefferson's direction. They were up to something, to be sure. What were they plotting?

Wagner was only one of an endless parade, as most of the guests (or so it seemed) made their way sooner or later to the head table. People came to pay Washington their respects, to offer prudent congratulations to Adams, to beg of one or the other of the Cabinet some favor or preferment. Most of them ignored the Vice-President entirely.

Benjamin Bache was one of the exceptions. Bache, publisher of the *Aurora* newspaper, was Benjamin Franklin's grandson, but his politics were very different. He was an attack dog for the Republican cause and lately Washington was his favorite target. He'd recently written that Washington's administration had "given currency to political iniquity, destroyed republicanism and enlightenment, and legalized corruption." That sums it up in a nice turn of phrase, he'd told himself proudly.

Jefferson regarded Bache's approach with a wary eye, hoping he wasn't going to cause him any trouble. He agreed with the man of course (he'd even slipped him information or an article from time to time) but he preferred to keep their dealings behind the scenes, anonymous.

"I so greatly regret," Bache began, addressing Jefferson but speaking loudly enough that the entire head table could hear him, "that you are only Vice-President now. It is a tragedy that such a

lesser man as Adams has beaten you. We can take comfort, however, that at least Washington will be gone. That incompetent mediocrity is the source of all the misfortunes of our country.”

Jefferson kept his expression carefully neutral, hoping Bache would say no more and quickly leave them. Washington was looking at him with icy disdain and Adams was glaring at him murderously. Most likely they thought Bache’s little speech was his own idea – did they imagine he’d do anything so unsubtle and obvious?

Then, as if to even the score, William Cobbett arrived, the publisher of *Porcupine’s Gazette*. His newspaper was just as outrageous as Bache’s, though more witty than shrill, and his views were firmly lodged at the opposite end of the political spectrum.

“It seems they have allowed the dogs at the table,” he began, addressing Washington but glancing first at Bache and then, with a smug little smile, at Jefferson. “I trust you will pay no mind to the pitiful babbling that seeps out from small minds. Nothing can detract, I assure you, from your lustrous Presidency.”

Washington’s anger ebbed, but Adams still glowered. Neither Bache nor Callender had seen fit to acknowledge him, and he was the President.

Jacob Martin, Senator from South Carolina, was mostly bored, though he did his best to make conversation with his neighbors. He didn’t much enjoy such large public affairs, but duty demanded his attendance.

Jacob was good-looking in an understated way, somewhat taller and slimmer than average. He was dressed well but conservatively in a matching suit of fine brown wool, devoid of ornament except for silver knee buckles on his britches. He still wore his long dark hair in the older style – lightly powdered, and tied

with a black silk ribbon – and his features were pleasing but not remarkable. He was a man one might easily pass by in a crowd. Only the searching intelligence of his gaze marked him as someone exceptional.

He thought about paying his respects to the head table as well, but decided against it. There was too much hypocrisy in this type of public display, too many insincere compliments, too much effusive praise that was shallow, artificial, and self-serving. Besides, his attention had been captured by one of the other guests – a woman.

Jacob's neighbor at dinner had pointed her out, sitting there across the room. A slender, graceful figure of middling age, she wore a stunning black velvet gown and seemed always engaged in some lively and amiable conversation.

"That's Mrs. Elizabeth Powel," his neighbor had informed him. "I'm surprised to see her here. She never goes out you know, not since her husband died. Most likely it's on President Washington's account – they say she practically worshiped him. She was his closest friend in Philadelphia, they say – some say, even closer." He gave Jacob a sly wink, and then went on, "I don't think the rumors are true myself, though, since Mrs. Washington seems to like her also."

At last the dinner was winding down and the waiters brought out the final offerings. Decanters and bottles were passed around, along with bowls of nuts and sweetmeats. Jefferson breathed a sigh of relief. Now he could leave this ghastly charade without attracting undue attention. He rose and left the table.

In the back, in the kitchen area, the pace was winding down. Everything had been served and many of the guests were leaving.

The waiters and staff, a mixed lot of ages, races, and nationalities, could stop for a moment to relax amidst the piles of dirty plates and glasses. Hungrily, they eyed the leftover food – now theirs by right, their spoils for the evening’s labors. In the interval between the final serving and the clearing-up they’d started in, sampling the dishes and toasting each other in English, French, Creole, German, and a smattering of other languages. It was, however, only a momentary preview of later pleasures. Only after the dining room was cleared and set to rights could they feast at leisure.

Young Peter German, a tall and gangly youth, was in the thick of it, ecstatic. He’d never served a dinner like this before. His uncle the cook had gotten him hired by Richardet only recently. This evening he’d had a hard time keeping up with it all and he looked it. His clothing, which anyway never seemed entirely to fit, was by now quite disheveled. His linen shirt was becoming untucked from his britches, his apron was askew, and his wispy yellow hair was sticking out here and there as if touched by some electrical magnetism.

He didn’t care. He’d had a devil of a time of it to be sure, but it was the experience of a lifetime. Not only was he waiting on the most distinguished people in the city, he’d even served the head table!

He tucked his shirt back into his britches and smoothed down his hair with a dampened hand, albeit ineffectually. He picked up the heavy pewter tray he’d loaded up with empty decanters, bottles, and glasses and started carrying it back to the kitchen area. He was only half-way across the room, however, when he stopped in mid-stride, abruptly. His friend Robert, who was coming up close behind, was hard pressed to stop himself from running into him.

“Hallo, watch out, will you,” Robert complained. “Have a mind to those behind you!”

Robert’s annoyance changed to concern, however, when Peter turned to face him. Peter’s face was contorted in a frightening grin and his eyes were wide and staring.

“I say, Peter, what’s wrong?”

“I don’t know, I . . .” Peter’s managed only these few halting words before he bent over in a tremendous spasm, hugging his abdomen. The heavy pewter tray he’d been carrying fell to the floor, sending shards of broken glass in all directions.

“Peter!” Robert yelled and everyone in the room turned to look. Still clutching his stomach, Peter was on his knees amidst the wreckage. He retched convulsively, over and over again. Then he fell over and lay still, rigid and unconscious.

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